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The Oppression Psychosis and the Immigrant

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THE problem of the immigrant has its roots deep in the laws of psychology and can never be solved except through an adaptation of practical treatment to inner impulses which have been nurtured through a long experience with abnormal conditions. The basis of these impulses has been the desire for freedom. I mean by desire for freedom the instinctive impulse for unfettered and therefore normal self-expression.

When the game is open and fair and thereby free, one may be beaten, disappointed, and yet happy from the surplus of joy arising out of the game itself, whether it be business, golf or war. But if the freedom of the conflict is limited in any way as by an unfair referee, a secret alliance or any other form of loaded dice, even though one may win, the thrill of it is mitigated; whereas if one loses, over and above the loss, there is a resentment deep and pervasive. Such a conflict is abnormal as contrasted with the free and normal struggle in which men will always find a fulness of life.

The abnormality, however, does not inhere in a relationship viewed merely externally, but must be estimated or measured entirely by the pathology of its psychological results. When certain kinds of psychopathological conditions are found, we may postulate an abnormal relationship as a cause. We need not appeal to abstract principles of justice to determine what shall be the relations of races, nations and classes, but we need to observe what

are the resultant attitudes and then we may adjust the method of statescraft and international relations so as to make inoperative the causes which produce the pathological conditions.

The particular form of pathology which is involved in our problem may be called the oppression psychosis. Oppression is the domination of one group by another, politically, economically or culturally, singly or in combination. Psychosis is a state of consciousness. The word originally applied to any state of consciousness, but it has been used so much in connection with psychopathology that now it may mean anything from insanity to an exaggerated attitude. In my use of the term I mean those persistent and exaggerated mental conditions which are characteristically produced under conditions where one group dominates another.

I do not wish to overemphasize the Freudian basis of my theory, because there is much in the Freudian system which is not essential to my treatment of the problem, but at the same time there is no question but that the Freudian approach throws much light on what has hitherto not been adequately analyzed.

The division of consciousness into the emotional, volitional and cognitive we know is merely artificial and convenient for clearer understanding, and is in part a hold-over from the theological and metaphysical methods of thought. We now think of these three as merely different aspects of the same unity and recognize that they have their roots below consciousness; and, so far as they spring from instincts, go back to evolutionary origins.

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A volitional impulse, then, may find its origin in some instinctive value which was once essential to survival, and there will be an appropriate emotion and idea to go with it. Thus the hunting instinct sends men fishing, and they feel joy in it, and at the same time formulate ideas which make it rational to fish. The will is the doing, and appears only in the process.

At the bottom of all consciousness is a "wish," "urge" or "disposition" which has its origin in an evolution in which it was preserved because it had a survival value. When the wish, urge, or will, as we shall call it, is frustrated or inhibited it does not yield passively. It was created to struggle, and opposition stimulates it to struggle harder.

Many diseases of the individual come from inhibitions of this sort which are imposed by all sorts of conditions of life. Many are products of convention. The psycho-analysts resolve many abnormal states of mind simply by making the patient understand the cause, and then when possible remove the cause.

Although part of what I am maintaining is analogy and not identical, I think there is no hope for a world of peace and coöperation until some similar method is applied to the problems arising out of the abnormal conflict of groups, whether nations or classes. The group is an object for which it is instinctive to strive, and in connection with which we have our strongest emotions.

A political, economic or cultural domination simply means the frustrated will of a group. They may be defined as autoocratic, plutocratic or cultocratic control. The struggle for freedom which has been so much a part of the world's history and much to the fore recently has not been a struggle for individual freedom so much as for freedom of groups. The

whole world responded immediately to the idea of "self-determination" because it is an instinctive "wish" for which people have always felt and strived, though it has only recently been defined.

Freedom is not what we have so often tried to make it mean, an absence of determinism, but merely an instinctive demand for the privilege of self-determination. When freedom is denied, frustration and disease result, not only for the individuals but in the relationship of societies. I mean by an oppression psychosis, then, the "balked disposition" of a group, which is reflected by all of the members characteristically.

In the struggle which always follows on the trail of frustration some substitute is found whose excesses measure the pathology. A nation, for example, in striving to be free, say the Irish; under the present economic and political conditions their struggle does not succeed. It has been the error of states to think that if the national aspiration was prevented from accomplishment their end was achieved. The Irish, however, have succeeded so well in demonstrating to the world that this is not true, that their case may be taken as a generic illustration for the oppression psychosis. In spite of this we still find the tendency to talk about the Irish as though they were normal; just as, before Carleton Parker, the I. W. W. were considered perverse instead of psychopathic. The reason for this is that their abnormality has not yet been objectively analyzed. On all such problems we get confused by talking about justice and rights as abstract principles when the evidence of them is found in the attitudes of people themselves. We have even come to attribute certain biological and racial characteristics to the Irish and to the Jews when their peculiari-

ties are nothing but injustice frozen into psychology.

In the diagnosis of national traits, of all people who have not been sovereign, we must always look for some oppression resultant of which there are certain outstanding symptoms that are amazingly uniform. "Americanization" must be largely psychiatry directed towards the outstanding facts or psychoses. An oppressed group is abnormally subjective. Its inability to realize itself freely has turned back attention to itself until its self-consciousness becomes entirely out of focus. In other words, an oppressed group is hyperaesthetic to itself. There is a complete incapacity to view its own problems objectively. Women have through long history belonged to an oppressed group and a prevailing psychosis is illustrated by the reply of the woman whose husband said to her, "The trouble with women is that they take everything personally." "That isn't so," she said, "I don't." Any one who has known Irish, Jews, Poles or any other people who have long been dominated is familiar with this tendency to personal interpretation. There is always a chip on the shoulder to which the slightest jar calls attention.

Closely related to this subjectivity is the tendency to be suspicious, which is nothing but a method of being on guard. Social workers have often remarked that certain immigrant nationalities are suspicious. In the group experience a suspicious attitude has been necessary as a protective device. In the effort to resist absorption which used all sorts of subterfuges, the dominated group learned to meet any overture with suspicion.

The effect on the nervous system may take various forms. Clearly the inhibition of an instinct must have a neutral sequence. In fact what we

have designated as Jewish characteristics are largely based on the nervous reactions which have resulted from more varieties and longer oppression than those of any other group. The Jew is introspective, analytical, aggressive and conspicuous. The Negro also has many of the same characteristics, although he has not yet developed so many compensatory values, such as religious solidarity and business technique.

A technique is developed by the group and the individuals in it to meet the situation and retain the self-esteem necessary to life. The oppressed peasant has a shrewdness and cunning which he would not have had if he could have had freer relations with his masters, and the Jewish capacity to trade was developed under a necessity for survival in which trade offered the only possibility. The technique is no more racial than is that of the college boy who learns the method of selling books, and succeeds in making it work.

Aggressiveness also is the product of the instinct for the suppressed individual to make up for his inferiority. A small man is more often than not self-assertive, and for the same reason that the Negro makes himself conspicuous; the inferiority complex is as applicable to groups as to individuals.

The most outstanding result of the oppression psychosis is to create a group solidarity which is far stronger than could have been created by any other means. Whenever there is a conflict both sides increase their solidarity, but the one which loses and is dominated has the supplementary instinct of hate to stimulate its unity. In most cases hate is developed by actual or feared domination. A genuine American opposition to Germany was not secured until it was possible to appeal to the fear of the imposition of German authority on America, and

then the hate instinct expanded without limit.

When the nation in its own right is prevented from self-expression there are always adopted certain compensatory objects of the will, or certain symbols on which the energy of the group is expended. Both the objects and the symbols come to have a reality and meaning which are not at all justifiable in themselves, but which, as defensive institutions, serve to preserve the group. Just as in the individual psychopathic case where the patient has transferred the focus of his attention to something abnormal, without any knowledge of the fact, so in this case a whole nation may embrace an idea or line of conduct, thinking it is acting rationally while it really is only instinctive.

Language and religion are the most notable compensatory forms of defense and aggression, and the energy which would be absorbed normally and unnoticed in the self-expression of the group becomes exaggerated and militant in appropriating these symbols of unity. Every immigrant group in America and all the new nations of Europe, and the whole proletarian movement of the world have psychoses in these matters, and we shall make no real progress in dealing with them unless we can see under fanatical zeal the deep current of a human instinct struggling for freedom.

In America we have inherited all the oppression problems of Europe and out of them we are trying to build up a coöperating democracy in which men may rise to their full human dignity.

One-tenth of our population is Negro with its actual or potential psychoses, and approximately one-third of the remainder is either foreign born or of foreign-born stock. Counting the Irish, it is no exaggeration to say that there are in the United States more than

twenty million people who are more or less psychopathic on account of one or all forms of oppression previously or at present experienced in Europe.

The problem of merging these peoples of varying backgrounds and intense attitudes ought not to be, and can not be, the method of the melting-pot which aims to make a uniform society. It can be solved only by the paradoxical method of indirection. Central Europe has proved conclusively that language can not be assimilated by attacking it directly. In my opinion more progress would have been made in "Americanization" if no one had ever thought of it, although that does not mean that it is not an advantage to promote humane relationships. What should be meant by Americanization is the bringing of all the people of America into participation in a progressive democracy, with tolerance toward the varying customs and beliefs, so as to articulate a society rich in content and orderly in process.

America to the immigrant is an opportunity in those directions in which he has previously been oppressed. The great danger is that similar forms of oppression may be found here. He brings a complex of attitudes and he needs a proper meeting of those attitudes. What he can give us most definitely is an object lesson in political science. If we heed it we may almost reform the world; if we ignore it we shall help to perpetuate what the war sought to banish from the earth.

But the teaching of English should be called education, not Americanization, which is likely to offend because it implies the same old culture domination which is more hateful than political domination. We should foster the self-respect of the immigrant by respecting the language for whose very existence his people have struggled for centuries. As Chicago and Milwaukee

have already done, we should offer in the high schools courses in any foreign language for which there are children demanding it in numbers sufficient to form a class. We could thus preserve the language possession already attained by the children, and also promote respect in the children for their parents; and in the parents we should be dislodging the suspicion that America practices the hated policy of Europe. There is no other way comparable with this for making English respected and loved, for it will thus stand out as a medium of opportunity and not as an instrument of annihilation.

In the same way the foreign born need their press. They need it because there is no other way in which they can learn the news of the world and the facts and purposes of American life. Even if they learn English they will not be able to get its spirit as they still live in that of their native tongue. How many of us who have studied French and German much more than the average immigrant will ever be able to study English would choose a French or German newspaper in preference to an English one?

We must accept at their face value, and with infinite patience, both the normal and the pathological attitudes. The foreign born will never forget the land of their origin and their responsibility for it so long as injustice prevails there; the identification of America with the problems of Europe, therefore, is so close that we can not escape our share in the responsibility however much we may wish. There can be no real Americanization of the immigrant unless there is a real league of nations, as the symbol of a real organization which will substitute in Europe a reign of justice for the reign of immorality. The isolation of America is pure illusion. The only way it can be re-

gained is by identifying ourselves with a democratic reorganization of Europe. If an unjust domination is imposed on Germany, the many millions of German stock in America will gradually and inevitably develop a political solidarity such as they never knew before.

Most of the nations of Europe have only one or two international problems, but we have every one of the problems of all the nations within our borders. To deny or overlook this is to pull down over our own heads the pillars upon which rest our political and social structures. No country in Europe is so dependent on just relationships as is the United States. Fifty per cent of the Irish, twenty per cent of the Poles, and a large percentage of all of the other long-oppressed peoples are in America and constitute from one-third to two-thirds of the population of many of our leading centers.

The foreign born need a renewal of the faith that has been waning faith in the freedom and democracy of America—to obtain which they came to these shores. Through what those who came here told their oppressed kinsmen in Europe, the latter came to look to America for salvation, and through them the real purpose of America may still be the salvation of Europe. To discriminate against those who are living among us means a perpetuation in America of the hatreds of the past in Europe. We must devise a political science and social practice which will give them the self-expression here that self-determination aims to give in Europe.

Just as finally the American authorities tried to mobilize the attitudes of the immigrants for purposes of war, so they must mobilize them for peace. Foolish and frantic methods of Americanization should yield to the realization that we are dealing with a psychological and moral problem, and that a

league of nations is potential in the United States. If we could organize the representatives of the countries of Europe who are in America behind a program for a reconstructed world, we should have an instrument for world-order whose potentiality can not be measured. Instead, we hide our heads in the sand and think to make them forget by teaching them English!

There is no panacea for dealing with the immigrant simpler than that required for the whole world. And the existing deep-seated psychoses can only be cured through a long process of time. We must deal as wise physicians with a soul-sick people for whose trouble we have no responsibility but who have become an integral part of our lives.

The spirit and method of American-

ization must be part and parcel of the solution of the problems of Europe. The relations of groups, both in conflict and in coöperation, is the paramount issue of human society. If we can learn even a few of the laws underlying the conflict of groups we shall make rapid progress where we have been blindly groping. In the meantime, however, all these problems will resist solution until there is a just reorganization of Europe. Only when the ideals of democracy have removed the possibility of imperialistic exploitation will there be no longer a need for chauvinism to combat it. America can not save herself unless Europe is saved. Whether we will or not, our immigrants make the world-problem our problem, and the problem primarily one of psychology.

Immigration, the Matrix of American Democracy

By ALLEN T. BURNS

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IMMIGRANTS to America for three hundred years have been inherently the more individualistic of their native fellow countrymen. Immigration with its inherent difficulties and new experiences has been a process of natural selection sorting out and appealing to the more daring, enterprising, self-reliant, self-assertive members of any group. Immigrants are all alike in possessing the spirit of the pioneer, the innovator, the explorer, the adventurer. America, the product of immigration, has come naturally and inevitably by her most distinguishing characteristics: freedom, liberty, independence.

Paul Bourget in *Outre Mere* says: "Everything in the United States grows clear when understood as an immense act of faith in the social beneficence of

individual energy left to itself." A friend recently remarked facetiously in connection with the deportation of Emma Goldman and her reported pleasure at being sent to Russia: "I don't see how, being an anarchist, she can like any country better than the United States." These remarks recall the original constitutional convention with its advocates of "as little government as possible."

Certain exigencies of immigration have always tended to modify this aggressive enterprising individualism. The journey was to a strange land, unknown difficulties were to be met, hostile forces were to be withstood, and tremendous obstacles to security and success had to be overcome. Rocky and wooded land or an industrial system of steel and strain had to be made